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ABSTRACT

A study explicated the process used to assess the general education component of the undergraduate curriculum at a public urban university with about 6,000 undergraduates. Emphasis was placed on the components of the methodology that provided data useful for suggesting changes to the program and the aspects of the process that did not yield viable data. Study components were: (1) an analysis of graduates' transcripts; (2) an analysis of syllabi; (3) a course audit through a faculty questionnaire; (4) an academic profile developed through student test results; (5) a survey of 315 students; and (6) a survey of faculty and staff completed by 73 faculty members (39%). Most of the methods produced useful information, but the transcript analysis and the administrative analysis required more time than had been allocated to carry out the complete study. The course audit, analysis of syllabi, and student and faculty surveys provided useful information about the general studies courses, but there were problems in timing and communication in the latter. Overall, it was apparent that multifaceted analyses gave a more complete picture of the effectiveness of the program. (SLD)

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The analysis of the general studies curriculum at a public urban university: What worked and what did not

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Introduction

Since the mid to late 1970's, the general education curriculum in colleges and universities across the United States has become an item of concern for higher education faculty and administrative staff. One reason has been attributed to greater competition for students. This resulted from factors such as the last "baby-boom" students having already become of college age, which caused struggles for survival by public and private institutions of higher education that were established to accommodate them, and an influx of more under-prepared students seeking college admission (Kanter, Gamson, and London, 1997). Also noted is the establishment of an "national agenda" for higher education published in higher education periodicals and spoken of at regional and national conferences (Kanter, et.al. 1997). Added to this was and economic slow-down during the 1980's which resulted in a "drying up" of the flow of Federal and state funds to public institutions. This led to a greater emphasis being placed on accountability for the products of the funds that were given for higher education (Kanter, et.al. 1997), i.e., the institutions were being held accountable for what their graduates knew and could do.

These phenomena resulted in questions such as "What should an educated person know?" and "What should a person with a college degree know how to do?" Applied and professional degree granting programs have specific career-based criteria established by accrediting agencies with which to assess specific knowledge and abilities, but they do not address what it means to be an "educated" person.

Once there is institutional agreement over the goals of a general education curriculum (which is no mean feat itself!) the problems of assessing and evaluating the program arises. The *Differential Coursework Methodology* (Ratcliff, 1988) utilizes standardized tests and course-taking practices, as revealed in analysis of graduates' transcripts, to evaluate student learning among the majors offered by an institution. But the generalizability of the results has been questioned (Pike and Phillippi, 1989). The value of tests like ACT's COMP and ETS's Academic Profile over institutionally constructed, "home grown", tests must be determined, as must the utility of administering a standardized test over using proxy measures, such as, student self-reports (Pike and Phillippi, 1989). Plus, there are other components of a good overall assessment strategy such as assessing the focus of the program, the manageability of the methodology, keeping the process on track, and administrative support (Smith, 1993).

Beyond what is mentioned above, there are special problems that have been associated with urban institutions. Their mission statements typically talk about providing access for under-served populations and serving diverse student populations, but there are disparities within that segment of institutions, especially in regard to development of programs and facilities, (Kinnick and Ricks, 1990), which reinforces the question of appropriateness of standardized tests.

The current study explicates a process used to assess the general education component of the undergraduate curriculum at an urban university. Emphasis is placed on the components of the methodology that provided data useful for suggesting changes to the program, and the aspects of the process whose data or procedures did not provide viable data.

The institution

The present study was undertaken at an urban institution—urban because we are situated in a community of about 200,000 to 300,000 people in the New York metropolitan area. The undergraduate population hovers around 6,000. Our total population is about 8,000—graduate and undergraduate. This paper discusses what worked and what did not work in our analysis of our general studies curriculum; where we got some useful data, and which parts of the methodology gave us less than useful data. It also describes what we would like to do again, and what we will not do again because, in all likelihood, we will be doing something like this again. It's not a dead issue

One aspect of the project should be noted—there was a deadline of December of 1997 to complete the analysis, a timeline of approximately one year from development to report distribution. The faculty senate wanted the report; the administration wanted the report.

The program that was in existence was comprised of 66 credits:

All college requirements (12 s.h.)
- The Requirement in English Communications (6 s.h.)
- The Requirement in Mathematics (3 s.h.)
- The Requirement in Career Exploration (2 s.h.)
- The Requirement in Computer Usage (1 s.h.)

Core curriculum (12 s.h.)
- Area 1.
  - Science (3 s.h.)
  - The Science Experience
- Area 2.
  - Social Science (3 s.h.)
  - Introduction to the Social Sciences
- Area 3.
  - Fine, Performing, Creative Arts (3 s.h.)
  - The Artistic Experience
- Area 4.
  - Humanities (3 s.h.)
  - Introduction to the Humanities

Distribution component (30 s.h.)
- Area 1 Natural Sciences (6 s.h.)
- Area 3. Fine, Performing, Creative Arts (6 s.h.)
- Area 4. Humanities (6 s.h.)
- Area 5. Communications and Contemporary World (6 s.h.)

Advanced electives (12 s.h.)
- 200, 300, 400 level courses

Method

Analysis of graduate transcripts

The first component of the analysis looked at graduates' transcripts by looking backwards at cohorts and analyzing their course sequences. We looked back on seven cohorts from 1990 to 1996. There were two reasons this was performed. The first was to get an idea of the course taking practices within majors to see if clusters of General Studies courses were common within the majors and analyze student performance on some discreet test in accordance with The Differential Coursework Methodology (Ratcliff, 1988).

The second component was to assess compliance with the University policy on course sequence enrollment. The policy states Core Courses and All College Requirement (e.g., composition and math, and introductory natural and social sciences) are to be taken within the first sixty-four credits completed. Because the University is situated in an urban environment, many under-prepared students enroll, as do many who require English as a second language courses. These students were eliminated from the analysis.

Analysis of syllabi

The next phase of the analysis was the analysis of syllabi, which was coordinated by the Dean of Arts and Sciences. Syllabi of faculty teaching General Studies courses were requested by the Dean who then sent them to the chair of a Faculty Senate committee for analysis. The analysis involved each syllabus being scored by three members of the committee—an effort to achieve inter-rater reliability on the general studies content contained in the description(s) of the course requirements. Syllabi were judged for references to critical thinking, writing, reading, oral presentation, computer, and mathematical skills in the tasks required of their students. So if they set it in their goals and objectives and then had that within their homework assignments or in their classroom assignments and the students would be doing these things, they would be getting either a one or a three. So we'd score it as either a zero if there was no reference to it or a three that there was a great deal of reference to these criteria.

Course audit

The course audit was a questionnaire sent to faculty. The instrument contained questions asking the faculty of their agreement with the goals of the general studies curriculum and whether they thought those goals were appropriate and achievable. The respondents were required to select from five-point scales their degrees of agreement with the statements of the goals.

Academic profile

The desire was to get representative percentages of the "native" students, (those students who started their post-secondary education at our university) who were freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors to take the test. We offered a $25.00 gift certificate to Barnes and Noble as an incentive to come for the test. Time frames were established and letters sent to students

telling them a time had been scheduled for them to come in to take the test. The initial response rate was very poor, even with the incentive (about 25 students responded). Subsequent invitations were sent to all native students on campus; approximately 3000 letters asking students to tell us when they could come for testing—this resulted in a sample of 249 students.

The Academic Profile comes in two forms. A long form, which yields information on each individual student, and a short form, which takes less time to administer but only gives institutional data. This form "cycles" the information among the test booklets so that a sample of test content is given to each student. The samples are later aggregated into an institutional score. The Profile contains an optional writing sample, which we chose to administer. ETS scores the Profile and returns the scores, by class level, obtained on the skills and abilities the instrument tests. The writing sample is generally scored by the institution.

Institutions using the Academic Profile are permitted to select from colleges and universities that have used the Profile, a number of institutions for comparative purposes (those scores are aggregated and comparisons are made to the aggregate scores, not individual institutions). To that end, institutions on the ETS list were selected using information in the IPEDS database, for comparative purposes.

Survey of faculty and staff

A survey questionnaire developed through a joint effort of the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences and the Office of Institutional Research. It was mailed in June 1997 to faculty who taught general studies classes in the previous semester. The questionnaire contained five sections. Three sections utilized five-point rating scales (Likert scales), a fourth section scale contained question with three response options, and the last asked questions about respondent characteristics—department, employment status and rank, and general studies courses taught.

Results

Analysis of graduate transcripts

The task of assessing by computer differences among the majors turned out to be a daunting one since many students change their majors during their college career. For example, a student may initially claim a natural science as a major, take an introductory course (or two), and then change majors to a social science. The student might then apply the introductory major course(s) to the general studies requirement.

It was possible, however, to obtain data about core course and all college requirement (ACR) enrollment activities through computer analysis of transcripts. The records of students who graduated between 1990 and 1996, delineated by class-level (i.e., the first 32 credits counted as their freshman year; 33-64 their sophomore year, etc.) were analyzed to assess the proportion of credits earned within the various general studies areas among the class-levels. The findings demonstrated that in the earlier years students tended to take fewer general studies courses

during the first years of their college career. In subsequent years the enrollment policies were more closely adhered to and students were taking more general studies courses. These analyses controlled for the number of students taking remedial and English-as-a-second-language courses.

Analysis of syllabi and course audit

The list of courses and their respective scores on the skills was tabulated. The total score per skill for each syllabus (range of possible scores was 0-9 if the syllabus was read three times—occasionally a syllabus was read more that three times) was entered into one table. (table 1), and percentages of the total possible score, depending on the number of times a syllabus was read, was entered into a second table (table 2).

Table 1 List of Syllabi and Skills Found

AREA	COURSE	CT	READING	MATH	ORAL	COMPUTER	WRITING
	CRISIS IN AMER	.00	3.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
A1	GENERAL BIOLOGY	2.00	3.00	.00	1.00	.00	3.00
	GENERAL CHEM	2.00	.00	2.00	1.00	.00	3.00
	BASIC PHYSICS	3.00	3.00	2.00	1.00	3.00	3.00
	EARTH SCIENCE	2.00	1.00	1.00	.00	.00	1.00
A2	SOCIOLOGY OF FAMILY	1.00	4.00	.00	4.00	.00	4.00
	ADVANCED SOC PSYCH	3.00	3.00	.00	2.00	.00	3.00
A3	DANCE	3.00	.00	.00	2.00	.00	2.00
	DRAWING & COMP	3.00	2.00	.00	1.00	.00	3.00
	CREATIVE WRITING	1.00	1.00	.00	2.00	.00	3.00
	MUSICAL LIFE IN US	1.00	1.00	.00	.00	.00	3.00
	MODERN MUSIC	2.00	1.00	.00	1.00	.00	3.00
	WATER COLOR	1.00	3.00	.00	1.00	.00	.00
	GOTH TO MOD ART	1.00	2.00	.00	.00	.00	3.00
A4	COMP RELIGION	3.00	3.00	.00	2.00	.00	3.00
	CRTITICAL THINKING	3.00	2.00	.00	3.00	.00	1.00
	CHILDREN'S LIT	3.00	5.00	.00	5.00	.00	5.00
	US HISTORY	3.00	8.00	.00	10.00	.00	7.00
	EARLY MOD EUROPE	1.00	3.00	.00	.00	.00	1.00
A5A	ELEMENT SPANISH II	1.00	2.00	.00	1.00	.00	.00
	SPANISH103	.00	2.00	.00	1.00	.00	2.00
	ELEM FRENCH II	1.00	3.00	.00	3.00	.00	1.00
A5B	INTRO AFRICAN CIV	1.00	2.00	.00	3.00	.00	1.00
	INTRO LATIN AM STUD	.00	3.00	.00	.00	.00	1.00
	WOMEN'S LIVES	1.00	3.00	.00	2.00	.00	3.00
	HIST OF WOMEN IN US	2.00	3.00	.00	.00	.00	3.00
	WOMEN & MEN	2.00	3.00	.00	.00	.00	3.00
ACR	INT ALGEGRA	3.00	1.00	7.00	.00	.00	.00
	FUND OF MATH	1.00	.00	3.00	.00	.00	.00

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	FUND OF COMM II	2.00	3.00	.00	2.00	1.00	3.00
COR	INTRO SOC SCIENCE	9.00	13.00	1.00	4.00	1.00	13.00
	SCIENCE EXPERIENCE	3.00	5.00	1.00	1.00	.00	4.00
	INTRO TO HUMANITIES	4.00	12.00	.00	2.00	1.00	8.00
	ARTISTIC EXP	9.00	5.00	.00	3.00	.00	11.00

Table 2

Average Percent of Skills Found per General Studies Area

General Studies Area	No. of Courses Represented	Total No. of Readings	Average Percent Critical Thinking	Average Percent Reading	Average Percent Oral Communication	Average Percent Computer Use	Average Percent Math Use	Average Percent Writing
	1	3.00	.00	100.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
A1	4	15.00	66.67	58.33	20.83	25.00	33.33	70.83
A2	2	7.00	62.50	100.00	83.33	.00	.00	100.00
A3	7	21.00	57.14	47.62	33.33	.00	.00	80.95
A4	5	24.00	64.67	89.33	73.33	.00	.00	67.33
A5A	3	9.00	22.22	77.78	55.56	.00	.00	33.33
A5B	5	15.00	40.00	93.33	33.33	.00	.00	73.33
ACR	3	13.00	47.62	38.10	22.22	11.11	66.67	33.33
COR	4	46.00	54.71	75.59	21.08	3.49	5.73	77.36
Grand Total Mean	4	17.00	46.17	75.56	38.11	4.40	11.75	59.61

Academic profile

The test consisted of two major components. The first, a 36 item multiple choice test; the second a short essay. Scoring of both sections was performed by ETS. A full-scale score was reported for each student, but not a score on each individual general studies skill or ability. A writing level score for each student resulted from the essay. The full-scale score was based on a standardized range of 400-500, with a standardized mean of 450. The institutional subject area scores were aggregated within class levels. These were based on a standardized range of 100-130, with the mean standardized at 115. ETS supplies comparative statistics derived from test results from other institutions that have utilized the instrument. Those results are reported in accordance with the Carnegie Classification conventions: comprehensive colleges and universities, liberal arts colleges, research/doctorate universities, and two-year colleges and technical institutions. Within those categories, data are provided for freshmen, sophomores, and upperclassmen. The descriptive statistics for students were reported along with a 95% confidence interval so that an estimate of total freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior scores could be made. ETS advises against comparing scale scores among the separate scales, e.g., not to compare Humanities scores with Social Science scores, but states that comparisons across class levels are appropriate. An example of how a general studies content area, Humanities, was reported, is contained below.

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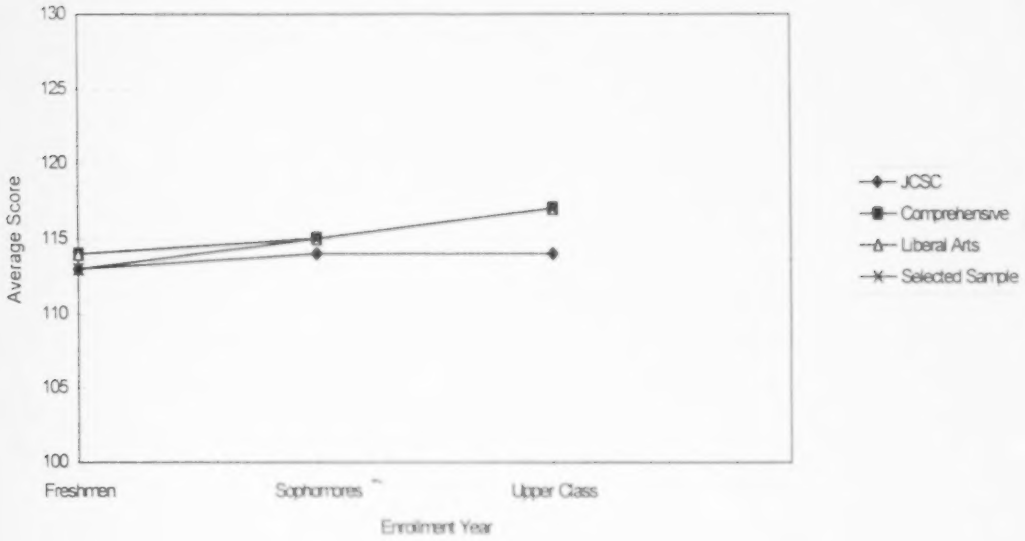
Figure 7. Humanities



Survey of students

A survey was administered using a randomized block design to a sample of general studies courses during the spring 1997, semester to ascertain the students' impressions of the current general studies program. Three hundred fifteen students completed the questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was made up of five sections. The first asked the students if they thought the program's goals were relevant and if the goals were achieved. The second section asked about specific goals of specific courses and if the students felt the course achieved the stated goal. The third section asked the students if they agreed with the poiicies and guidelines of the general studies program. The third section asked the students their opinion of the adequacy of the distribution of general studies credits. The last section asked about overall satisfaction with the program. There were also demographic questions such as total credits earned, total gpa, and academic aspiration of the students.(A copy of the survey instrument is contained in the appendix.)

Results were reported as descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, medians and modes) of the Likert scales for each item (table 3).

Table 3

Table 7

Responses to Student Satisfaction Survey's 5-Point (Likert) Scales

Section I

GSPG Relevant	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11
N	298	290	293	285	294	293	296	300	287	290	293
Mean	3.7	4.0	4.1	3.7	3.8	3.7	4.0	3.7	3.7	3.4	3.7
SD	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.4
Median	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Mode	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Achieved											
N	274	285	283	280	279	279	281	276	283	277	277
Mean	3.4	3.8	3.8	3.5	3.7	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.2	3.4
SD	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3
Median	3	4	4	3.5	4	4	4	4	4	3	3
Mode	3	5	5	3	5	5	5	4	5	3	3

Section II

GSPCG	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12
N	313	313	313	306	303	303	296	296	294	296	295	295
Mean	3.4	2.2	2.4	2.6	2.5	2.5	3.4	3.4	3.4	2.9	3.3	2.8
SD	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.9	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.6
Median	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	2
Mode	2	1	2	1	1	1	5	5	5	5	5	1

	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20	Q21	Q22	Q23
N	294	293	293	293	293	293	290	295	295	299	299
Mean	3.2	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.5	3.4	3.2	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.0
SD	1.5	1.4	1.9	1.5	3.3	1.3	2.8	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.4
Median	3	3	3	3	3	3.0	3	3	3	3	3
Mode	5	5	5	5	5	3	5	2	2	5	2

Section III

GSPP	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
N	307	306	306	303	305	306	306	306
Mean	3.6	3.2	2.6	2.8	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.3
SD	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.1	1.1
Median	4	3	2	3	3	3.0	4	3
Mode	5	3	2	2	3	4	4	4

Section IV

GSPCD	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
N	304	307	305	302	300	303	305	304
Mean	2.9	1.7	1.9	1.4	1.9	2.3	2.3	2.4
SD	4.1	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	1.2	0.5	0.5
Median	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
Mode	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	2

Section V

OS	Q1	Q2	Q3
N	305	306	305
Mean	3.3	2.7	3.2
SD	1.9	1.1	1.1
Median	3	3	3
Mode	4	3	4

Demographic Q1	FCI	FCII	CD	CAT	AE	SE	I to H	I to SS
N	273	241	195	228	172	194	208	173
Mean	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
SD	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0
Median	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Mode	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Q2	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5A	Area 5b	GSAE
N	232	234	228	231	234	209	206
Mean	4.0	4.1	3.7	4.0	3.7	2.7	3.7

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There were also several questions that required categorical responses. Questions such as, "Have you completed the computer as a tool course?" The responses to these questions were reported as SPSS "Frequencies" output.

Survey of faculty and staff

One hundred and eighty-nine questionnaires were mailed, 73 usable responses were received resulting in a response rate of 39% (the questionnaire is contained in the appendix)

The highest level of agreement over what is an appropriate goal is to improve students' ability to communicate clearly. The lowest agreement is with the goal to improve students' ability to ask wisely. In an analogous fashion, the responses to the statement of achievability were reduced and tabulated. The most agreement was obtained over the achievability of offering opportunities to achieve an awareness of social problems and structure.

There was general faculty agreement that remedial reading and writing should be completed before the core courses are taken; there should be continuos involvement in the College's writing program until completion of Fundamentals of Communications II is completed; and, that all general studies courses should require reading and writing. The highest level of agreement was with the policy of requiring reading. The lowest level of agreement was with requiring completion of all ACRs and 35 general studies credits before declaration of a major.

Most respondents felt the 12 credits of core and 12 credits of advanced elective requirements were sufficient. They also felt the 30 credit distribution and 66 total credit requirement were sufficient, and that the three credit math and six credit English requirements were enough.

There was a section overall asking about overall satisfaction with the program. The responses did not reflect strong agreement or disagreement with statement that the program is meeting it goals or needs revision. But there was general agreement that the program was providing a good liberal arts and sciences education and was meeting its goals. There was general disagreement with the statement that the program did not need revision. However neither case reflects a majority opinion.

The last section asked information about the respondents—their employment status, department, years of employment, and the category(ies) of general studies courses taught . Most of the respondents were full professors. The average amount of time at the University was 18 years (median 20; tri-modal at 1 year, 25 years, and 30 years; the distribution was negatively skewed with a 36 year range—minimum 1 year, maximum 37 years); the most highly represented department was English (13 respondents). Half of the respondents have taught an ACR course, 60% had taught core courses, 80% taught distribution courses, 70% taught advanced elective courses.

Administrative analysis

This phase of the study was terminated due to the confounding characteristics of the number of courses listed as general studies area courses and the habit of substituting courses when students change majors. This problem is similar to the one encountered in the transcript analysis.

Discussion

Most of the project produced useful information, however several components proved to require more time than was allocated to carry out the complete design. The transcript analysis and the administrative analysis are the instances in which this was the case.

Course audit and analysis of syllabi

The course audit provided some interesting data about how general studies courses were addressing, or failing to address, the University's general studies goals. A problem associated with this phase of the analysis, though, is that a goal may be addressed in the actual activities of the course, but not be presented in the syllabus, or vice versa. For example, a syllabus may not state that students are required to submit a paper that has been created with the use of a computer word-processing program, but the faculty member assigning the project requires the paper to be produced in that fashion. Or, the degree to which critical thinking is required within the context of the class-work and assignments cannot be stated in the body of a syllabus.

Although syllabi have been requested each semester, one hundred percent compliance has been a problem. Plus, adjunct instructors taught about 30% of the general studies classes and reaching them to obtain their syllabi has been a problem historically. A new time frame is being enacted within which the request for syllabi will go out to faculty in the beginning of the semester, rather than later. It was felt that issuing the request during the middle of the semester caused faculty to have to reprint syllabi, but in the beginning they already have copies in-hand. This is compounded by the fact that the University's culture is unaccustomed to assessment. As we move forward with our assessment initiatives this problem should be eliminated.

Transcript analysis

To do a transcript analysis is a time intensive project necessitating, at some level, individual analyses of paper copies because decisions concerning course applicability are required. Because of this, this component had to be abandoned. Would we do this again if time permitted? We most likely would. Especially utilizing something like the academic profile or a "home grown" objective test. Valuable information can be obtained via cluster analysis, discrimanant analysis, or other analytic means, be they quantitative or qualitative, to discern the course taking practices within the majors. As a matter of fact, a new general studies curriculum has been proposed incorporating an assessment methodology consisting of an instrument developed "in house".

Academic Profile

There are advantages and disadvantages to using a pre-made standardized test of general education. Among the advantages are the ability to compare your students' results to students from other institutions who have taken the test; you get the product of the expertise of a sophisticated staff of test developers; and, you do not have to score the results. But, the ability to compare your students with those at other institutions results in a time consuming, tedious task, especially if you try to select institutions with which to compare yourself. For the present analysis, selecting comparable "sister" institutions from the list provided by ETS required searching the National Center for Education Statistics database of IPEDS (Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System) data for qualities that matched our institution's. For example, Carnegie classification, control, ethnic breakdown of students, general and educational expenditures, and campus location all had to be considered in the process.

Furthermore, in using a standardized test, you cannot be sure the test has been constructed to weight the various components of general education in the same proportions as your curriculum. For example, the test may place a great deal of emphasis on western civilization in the test of humanities, whereas your curriculum places more emphasis on the international components of world history.

Survey of students

This information can be helpful in understanding the students' feelings about general education, their impressions of the way the content is being delivered, and their overall satisfaction with the program. Just as freshman surveys can identify changes in incoming students, this type of information can alert you changes in student academic goals.

Survey of faculty and staff

The importance of this is similar to the importance associated with student satisfaction with the program. Clear statements of the goals of the program and of whether the perception is that the goals are being obtained will lead to an understanding of the effectiveness of the program and how soon major changes are going to be called for. If this survey is performed on a regular basis, though, major changes should not be called for because the program will continuously be adjusted to conform to the desires of the students and faculty/staff, as per the results of the surveys.

Major problems experienced in carrying out this phase of the analysis had to do with timing and communication, which led to the survey being administered twice and data being sent to more than one place. The survey was initially administered in the latter part of the spring semester, when faculty members were preparing for finals or grading papers. Plus, the initial survey was carried out through the Dean's office, which may have precipitated reticence to comply on the part of some faculty. It was felt, at the end of the semester, that a better response rate was obtainable by mailing the surveys during the summer to faculty homes with a stamped self-addressed envelope returnable to the Director of Institutional Research. The thought did not occur to the researchers that some faculty might be away and unable to respond, or that others who had previously responded would not respond again, even though they were asked to do so in the cover letter.

Conclusion

Optimal use was not made of all the data collected. Part of this can be attributed to the time frame provided to re-design the program; and some is attributable to the mixture of perceived purposes of a general studies program. The surveys of students, faculty, and staff can help an institution identify its own definition of general education and assist in formulating policies in its administration. Content tests can provide an understanding of whether the material is being learned by the students, and transcript analysis can result in 1) an awareness of the effectiveness of the policies, and 2) identification of major program curricula that do better at providing support for the general education program. This type of multi-faceted analysis will give a complete picture of the effectiveness of the program and the satisfaction with it on the part faculty and staff. Add to this an administrative analysis comprised of use of funds apportioned to support the program and faculty involvement, and a complete planning and assessment package can be developed.

One aspect that was not addressed in the assessment methodology, which was brought up afterwards, is eliminating fear and developing trust on the part of all concerned. A suggestion of keeping the activities public and the rationale for the activities has been voiced and will be explored in future assessments.

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